



## TEN IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF A 21ST CENTURY FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACH

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### Abstract:

Foreign language instructors want and need to keep up with the rapid changes in the field of foreign language teaching and learning, but sometimes have a hard time identifying which areas they should focus on (and within each area, what to do) to make their instruction in line with 21<sup>st</sup> century approaches. The present article describes 10 areas instructors should examine and reflect on (technology, culture, collaboration, interaction with native speakers, communication and grammar, materials, skills, content, motivation, and professional development) to assure they are using innovative techniques that reflect modern philosophies in the field of foreign and second language teaching.

**Keywords:** foreign language, pedagogy, approach, methods, technology

### Introduction

During the history of foreign and second language teaching, we have seen several methods come and go. All of them seemed promising in the moment they were conceived and had advantages over the preceding methods, but overtime they showed shortcomings and finally were abandoned. New methods sometimes confuse instructors regarding how to think or teach because “*caught up in the whirlwind of fashion, methods tend to wildly drift from one theoretical extreme to the other*” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 28). Some of the most well-known methods include the grammar-translation method, the direct method, the audio-lingual method, and the natural approach.

We have also seen disagreements over terminology. Brown (2001) mentions two different examples: Anthony (1963) defined ‘approach’ as a philosophy, ‘method’ as a procedure, and ‘technique’ as the implementation in the classroom; whereas Richard and Rogers (1986) used the term ‘method’ as an umbrella term that encompassed approach, design, and procedure, where ‘approach’ was the philosophy, ‘design’ was the objectives and the syllabus model, and ‘procedure’ was the classroom techniques. To add more

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confusion, some experts disagree in whether a particular method is a method or an approach, which is the case of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Nowadays, experts prefer to avoid the word 'method' or 'approach' altogether and use the term 'pedagogy', like the pedagogy of multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1996). Moreover, some approaches are just different ways to implement previous approaches, which is the case of content-based instruction (CBI) and task-based instruction (TBI), which are rooted on the principles of CLT (Brandl, 2021; Bula Villalobos, 2014).

In this article, I will use the term 'approach' as a philosophy behind classroom activities, but not linked to any fixed method that may determine instructor techniques and limit creativity or teaching freedom. Nowadays, most experts agree that there is no 'best' method to teach foreign languages (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Nunan, 1991) or that different methods are 'best' for different people or for different teaching contexts (Prabhu, 1990). The reason most methods eventually became obsolete or not popular is due to three main reasons: 1) society changes and have different needs, 2) technology evolves and provides new affordances, and 3) new language learning theories emerge. To survive all these changes, instructors need to use approaches that are malleable and versatile, rather than methods that are fixed and based on foreign language theories that eventually become archaic. This is the post-method era. According to Brown (2001), the instructor's approach is of utmost importance because it is a *"rationale for language learning and teaching... that includes a number of basic principles... on which you can rely for designing and evaluating classroom lessons"* (p. 40). He also acknowledges that this rationale is not set in stone and should change with your experiences. As Prabhu (1990) puts it, we need to move from *"a preoccupation with teaching methods to an effort at 'curriculum development' or 'course design'"* (p. 165). He specifically cites Richards (1985) claiming that what is important is not which method to adopt but rather how to develop instructional activities.

But just because we should not commit to a particular method, it does not mean we should not benefit from the best insights that each method provided. According to Prabhu (1990), *"there is some truth to every method"* (p. 166). Instructors should be able to maintain over time those aspects that are successful and to incorporate them efficiently and comfortably into their teaching approach. Harlan (2000) claims that *"the ideal teaching methodology includes a combination of the various approaches which have been introduced over the years"* (p. 19). The job at hand, thus, is to identify which aspects have been successful and should be maintained.

The following are ten essential aspects of instruction that instructors need to evaluate and reflect on to assure they are adapting well to a 21<sup>st</sup> century foreign language pedagogy.

## 1. Technology

After a year of pandemic that forced us to teach remotely and depend entirely on instructional technologies, it is evident that technology should be integrated in any

modern teaching approach. In the field of foreign language teaching, technology helps instructors by providing access to a wide variety of creative, multimodal resources and tools, but also facilitates instruction by offering synchronous tools (such as Zoom, Skype, and Google Hangout) to deliver the class remotely, and Learning Management Systems (LMS) (such as Canvas, Blackboard, and Moodle) to keep materials organized. And even if there is no instructor, learners can access multitude of websites and mobile apps to learn languages on their own (such as Rossetta Stone, Duolingo, and Babbel). It is undeniable that *“mobile technologies... are changing L2 users’ world”* (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 22) and our teaching approach needs to change along. According to Eaton (2010), mobile technology is definitely *in*, and it might even replace textbooks in the future.

Regarding our students, technology is a crucial part of their lives, offering them access to unlimited resources on their own schedule (Lai & Kritsonis, 2006) and a wide range of delivery modes that make learning more personalized and enjoyable (Pop, 2010). Riasati et al. (2012) claims that technology *“has accelerated a shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered approaches”* (p. 26) and mentions a few studies that show other benefits, such as enhancing language proficiency and academic skills, increasing student awareness of the quality of their work, helping connect with the world outside of the classroom, and reducing anxiety. According to Eaton (2010), because students know more about technology than their instructors, *“old, traditional, hierarchical and patriarchal attitudes are giving way to more collaborative approaches”* (p. 9). In addition, she says that technology is the perfect way for students to demonstrate their work through portfolios, videos, blogs, wikis, podcasts, and so on.

Despite these affordances, we must be cautious due to the known problems caused by technology, such as students’ lack of online learning skills or self-directed learning (Kuama & Intharaksa, 2017; Lai & Kritsonis, 2006), technical issues (Coman et al., 2020; Freiermuth & Huang, 2021), opportunities for cheating (Beeman, 2020), overstimulation and distractions (Richtel, 2010), addition and harm to mental health (Rosenquist et al., 2021), and lack of access for disadvantaged communities (Collis & Vegas, 2020; Lai & Kritsonis, 2006; Riasati et al., 2012). Regarding instructors, we see lack of teacher training, negative attitude toward technology, time wasted looking for materials, and extra time needed to implement these tools (LeLoup & Ponterio, 1996; Riasati et al., 2012). As Kelm (2015) puts it, *“we have a new challenge. Our traditional methodology is confronting the reality of our digital age”* (p. 1). What is clear, though, is that the affordances that technology offers are indispensable in any 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching approach.

## 2. Culture

Informed by research findings and sociocultural theories, culture (both with a big C and a small c) has been integrated into the foreign language curriculum, first as sporadic, dispensable pieces of interesting information, later as context for language instruction, and finally as content for analysis. In the last twenty years, our students have transitioned from the role of tourist to the role of sojourner (Byram, 2021), who is an individual that

no longer looks at the target culture from the outside, but from the inside; understands and reflects critically about the target culture; interacts with native speakers; and takes action and improves others' conditions. Students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (also called transcultural, crosscultural and pluricultural CC) must be promoted to achieve a successful, fulfilling foreign-language learning experience. Van Houten and Shelton (2018) define ICC as an *"active participation in communicating with those from another culture"* (p. 35). To do that, instructors need to address the cognitive, the affective and the behavioral components of culture. One successful design to integrate culture into the foreign language class has been content-based instruction. Kuramavadivelu (2003) noted:

*"...creating critical cultural consciousness in the L2 classroom offers immense possibilities for teachers as well as learners to explore the nuances of cultural and subcultural practices in a meaningful way. It involves constant and continual self-reflection..., which leads to meaningful cultural growth."* (p. 285)

The support of internationally recognized organizations such as the Council of Europe, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), and the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL) has helped instructors integrate culture into the curriculum by explaining how culture is related to language: Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the relationship between the practices and perspectives as well as the products and perspectives of the cultures studied (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015).

ICC develops gradually (Byram, 2021; Tran & Duong, 2018). Byram (2021) uses the metaphor of completing a jigsaw puzzle, where the *"early stages have provided the edges and corners and at later stages, learners, sometimes with the help of teachers, gradually complete elements of the whole picture"* (p. 104). He also warns instructors of the *"dangers of presenting 'a culture' as if it were unchanging over time or as if there were only one set of beliefs, meanings and behaviours in any given country"* (p. 51). Schenker (2013) found that American and German students after a 12-week asynchronous exchange were interested in culture, appreciated the importance of learning it, and suggested that culture should be explicitly taught in foreign language classes. Tran and Duong (2018) also saw that both students' linguistic competence and motivation increased when ICC was emphasized.

### **3. Collaboration**

Collaboration and cooperation draw from sociocultural theory or social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1962). When students work together building knowledge (particularly when it is done in steps), they review their work more often, learn from their peers, and enjoy working. The instruction is more learner centered. Instructors become scaffolders rather than judges and help their students improve their work progressively. Assessment (electronic or paper) portfolios, for example, will capture the nature of this progression (Eaton, 2010). It is likely that collaboration utilizes higher cognitive abilities, which

include analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating in Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956) or analyzing, evaluating, and creating, in the revised version (Krathwohl, 2002).

When we give our students tasks or projects to work collaboratively, we are giving them agency, self-directness, and a purpose. They become active learners responsible for their own learning and they reflect more on the work they do. Lee-Smith (2021) and Liu (2015) state that students will become engaged and motivated if they are empowered, the instructor supports their autonomy as learners, and the language is connected to other disciplines or is used outside the classroom. According to Eaton (2010), using *"projects that challenge students to reflect... and sharing the results of these projects in public ways"* (p. 11) is the way to go. Task-based instruction (TBI) and project-based instruction (PBI) are two instructional designs that incorporate collaboration among students. These two designs will be discussed further in section 7 of this article.

#### **4. Interaction with Native Speakers**

Like collaboration, the act of social interactions for communication purposes also draws from sociocultural theory or social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1962), and it has been well established that negotiation of meaning (changes in input and interaction to make yourself understood) facilitates language acquisition (Long, 1981, 1983). However, there is a limit to the gains obtained in learner-learner and learner-instructor interactions, not to mention that classroom interactions often do not have real communicative purpose. Ideally, we want our students to interact with native speakers. These interactions are not only more authentic and fruitful, but also more interesting.

Studying abroad is an ideal situation, but not available to all students. Community-engagement pedagogy is also a good choice, but it has limitations as well. The alternative would be interacting with native speakers with no traveling involved and without compromising safety or involving mobility issues. With today's technology, face-to-face conversations with virtual native speakers are just one click away. The Internet offers a wide variety of online platforms like [LinguaMeeting.com](https://www.LinguaMeeting.com) or [TalkAbroad.com](https://www.TalkAbroad.com)<sup>ii</sup>, where students can interact with native speaking coaches (usually instructors or tutors) in a controlled and safe environment. These virtual exchanges (also known as telecollaboration, virtual tandems, online video chats...) can also be done informally on less structured platforms where both parties are interested learners (no coach present) who want to learn each other's language or just communicate in one of the languages, such as Conversation Exchange, Skype Hangouts, or HelloTalk. Studies that gathered self-reported data show that students believed these virtual interactions increased their language skills, their interest in other countries and cultures, and their interest about continuing learning (Ceo-Francesco, 2015; Cuervo Carruthers, 2017; Marull & Kumar, 2020).

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<sup>ii</sup> For a list of similar sites, check [https://www.pinterest.com/CLIC\\_Illinois/language-learning-sites/](https://www.pinterest.com/CLIC_Illinois/language-learning-sites/)

Either in person or virtually, it is undeniable that interactions with native speakers not only help students improve their language skills but also their ICC<sup>iii</sup>. Marull and Kumar (2020) claims that these exchanges allow students *“to focus on the human element that drives language acquisition, personal relationships, and which is so often lacking from traditional language classes”* (p. 630). Freiermuth (2010) sees certain advantages of doing the exchanges online, when compared to in-person exchanges, such as a high participation rate (probably because the student feels less intimidated), and this could be a good reason to use online exchanges as a transition toward real, in-person exchanges (e.g., study abroad, community engagement, internships in foreign countries).

## 5. Communication and Grammar

Modern teaching approaches do not favor teaching techniques where the focus of the lesson is to practice a particular grammar point that has been explained by the instructor at the beginning of the class. However, this deductive approach is usually present in most textbooks (Fortune, 1992, as cited in Benavides Montalván, 2018) and is still present in many college foreign language courses at the beginner and intermediate level. Osa-Melero (2017) states that *“the deductive approach tends to emphasize grammar at the expense of meaning and it promotes passive participation among learners”* (p. 53). However, implementing a strict inductive approach to grammar teaching has become very difficult because of the need for adults to have explanations and their difficulty to extract patterns intuitively. Thus, grammar has not disappeared yet from the college foreign language class.

The debate between teaching grammar explicitly or implicitly has been going on for decades and continues. Instead of choosing between these two options, we should consider a third option where we can work with grammar in a more meaningful way. In this scenario, communication and meaning precede grammar explanations and form (ACTFL n.d.a); and grammar, which is an important element of communication, should be addressed within meaningful communicative contexts (ACTFL, n.d.b). ACTFL supports this third option, stating that *“learners should be expected to learn grammar implicitly through target language use and explicitly through the discovery of grammatical rules through use and meaningful examples”* (ACTFL, n.d.b, para. 3).

In courses where there are asynchronous days of class, the instructor can assign students to study grammar explanations and practice grammar on their own in close-ended exercises and gamified activities (e.g., Kahoot!). Games and virtual animated tutorials (usually found on textbook homework platforms) can make grammar more palatable. Writing assignments can also provide evidence of students' understanding of grammar, and instructors should provide feedback for both meaning and form in these assignments. If the instructor realizes that a particular grammar point is not being understood or applied correctly, some class time can be dedicated to the review of the

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<sup>iii</sup> For more guidance on integrating culture in a meaningful, interactive way, check the NCSSFL-ACTFL [Can-Do statements](#) for Intercultural Communication.

point to reassure students and to avoid fossilization of errors. By moving most of the grammar learning out of the class, class time can be spent using contextualized, authentic, and culturally relevant communicative activities.

## 6. Materials

For a few years now, we are seeing a trend to eschew one item that has been present for decades in our classes: the textbook. Some instructors are seriously considering eliminating the textbook due to several factors: they are very expensive whereas the Internet is an endless source of free materials, they have components that the instructor never uses in class, and the typical design is old-fashioned (explicit grammar explanations followed by decontextualized exercises, and cultural topics shown superficially). Other instructors think that textbooks have important advantages: they offer valuable content and other content that can be adapted, they suggest a specific sequence that can be followed in multi-section courses, and they come with an online platform for homework. Although some research-based changes have been observed in the content of current foreign language textbooks (Vold, 2017), many instructors associate textbooks to traditional methods that want to leave behind. Hadley (2018) claims that for students and inexperienced instructors, having a textbook is reassuring, and he also adds that institutional decision makers find textbooks from reputable publishers comforting because they know the content has been created and tested before it was published.

When facing the decision of keeping or eliminating the textbook, instructors have a dilemma: If they get rid of the textbook, they will be responsible for designing the course (backward design has been suggested) and creating and providing all the materials, which is a lot of work, on top of *“preparing the lesson, carrying it out, monitoring its unfolding, and managing the dynamics of a classroom full of students”* (Brown, 2001, p. 137). Already in the 90s, LeLoup and Ponterio (1996) noted that finding useful resources online can be a daunting task for a busy teacher just because the Internet is a bottomless source. On the other hand, by eliminating the textbook, the instructor would no longer be confined and could feel freer to create and design instructional sequences in a different way, to teach grammar using innovative methods, or to integrate culture with an emphasis on analysis and reflection. Personally, I do not see a problem with eliminating the textbook if three conditions exist: 1) materials are created before the course starts, and in multi-section courses, preferably in collaboration with colleagues to make sure everyone is on the same page; 2) students have one place for consultation and study purposes (e.g., course packet, files in folders on the Learning Management System); and 3) some of the homework is designed to be graded automatically. These conditions would make both students' and instructors' jobs easier and would assure the course runs smoothly. However, if these conditions are not met, eliminating the textbook might leave both students and instructors adrift and impose too heavy a load on instructors.

Regarding other materials, the Internet is an endless source of multimodal resources for the foreign language class, and it has been noted that *“multimodal texts are perceived as meaningful and motivational resources”* (García León et al., 2011, p. 33). It is not

easy to find the perfect material, but you can get something close to what you are looking for and just adapt it to your needs. You can also get materials from other sources outside the Internet, such as pictures, books, TV commercials, live performances, guest interviews, clips of movies, realia, menus, music, brochures, and so forth. In sum, class materials should be as authentic as possible –without diminishing the importance of adapted materials for the beginning courses–, interesting, modern, relevant, appropriate, multimodal, and culturally engaging.

## 7. Skills

Methods and approaches that advocate the integration of language macro skills –that is, listening, reading, speaking, and writing—do so on the premise that language is not a fragmented entity, it is *“not the sum of its many dissectible and discrete parts”* (Brown, 2001, p. 49). If in real life, the skills are not separated, neither should they be in the classroom. In the past, methods that advocated the strength of one or two skills over the rest, such as the audiolingual method or the grammar-translation method, did not last. Sawir (2005) mentions that traditional English as a Foreign language (EFL) pedagogies in East and Southeast Asia focus on reading scholarly documents and writing essays and letters, which is not working any longer in a globalized society and is causing communication difficulties in students from those countries when they travel.

Integrating skills exposes students to authentic language and emphasizes meaning over form. In addition, all students can benefit no matter their learning style (Jing, 2006, as cited in Gautam, 2019). *“Most teachers recognize that the four language skills support each other and are found together in real-life language use”* (COERLL, n.d., para. 1), so it makes sense that we should integrate them when we teach. Two types of integrated-skill instruction are content-based instruction (CBI), also known as content-based learning, and task-based instruction (TBI), also known as task-based learning (Gautam, 2019; Oxford, 2001). Another one would include project-based instruction (PBI) or project-based learning. CBI emphasizes content learning (e.g. culture, history, literature) and the target language is just a medium to achieve that goal. In TBI, the instructor assigns tasks to students (such as reserving a hotel room), which they must do in collaboration using the target language. PBI is similar in nature, but projects are more complex and longer than tasks. PBI<sup>iv</sup> is already being used with K-12 students because it keeps the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in mind (see Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, 2011), it aligns with ACTFL’s Standards, and there is more time in the K-12 curriculum to accommodate these projects, compared to college-level courses (Mikulec & Miller, 2011).

Regarding assessment, there are several options: Skills can be assessed independently using the rubrics provided by the ACTFL proficiency guidelines (ACTFL, 2012), skills can be assessed in combination of two (for example, an interview would entail listening and speaking), or all skills can be assessed at one time using ACTFL’s

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<sup>iv</sup> For a more detailed explanation and examples of PBI, check Conca (n.d.), Cottrell (2019), and Doehla (2011).



Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA). An IPA is a cluster of tasks that “*reflect one of the three modes of communication –Interpretive, Interpersonal and Presentational. The three tasks are aligned with a single theme or content area.... IPAs are standard-based, performance-based, developmental in nature, integrative*” (CARLA, 2019a, para. 1).

## 8. Content

Content-based instruction –also known as content-based language teaching (CBLT)—originally came about with the rise of dual immersion programs and bilingual education in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where some subject matter classes were taken in a foreign language. “*The aim is to learn content through an L2, and to achieve some level of bilingualism in the process*” (Graves & Garton, 2017, p. 462) and the instructors are usually not foreign language teachers, but content teachers (math, sciences, etc.). CBI is common in bridge courses that focus on literature or culture and in language courses for the professions (e.g., Spanish for medical personnel). Compared to TBI and PBI, where students easily tend to switch to the first language when negotiating and collaborating with their peers, in CBI that does not happen as often, since the content is in the target language, class instruction is in the target language, and there are not as many tasks or projects to work on<sup>v</sup>. CBI is extensively supported by Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research as well as educational and cognitive psychology (CARLA, 2019b) and it can be adapted to the students’ language proficiency by making it more content-driven or more language-driven. This latter format appeared in Europe in the 1990s (Graves & Garton, 2017) and it is known as content and language integrated learning (CLIL). In CLIL, the instructors are foreign language teachers who use content as context, meaning, language is contextualized in some sort of content to become more meaningful. This is being done at the beginning and intermediate levels more often.

Although CBI and CLIL both can be both teacher-centered and learner-center, a learner-center approach is more recommended to engage and motivate 21<sup>st</sup> century students. Usually, the content is approached using the same three phases used for videos or readings: Before exposing students to the content, their background knowledge needs to be activated and they need to be provided with basic vocabulary and communicative strategies. During the exposure, certain points need to be highlighted and students need to practice and critically think about what they are learning. After the exposure, students need to synthesize and reflect on what they learned and apply that knowledge or create something with the knowledge they acquired.

One challenge that CBI and CLIL pose is that some students learn the content better than the language or the other way around. Lightbown (2014) states that the instructor needs to find the balance between content teaching and language teaching by focusing on both areas in every lesson so that they can progress simultaneously. This can make instructors uneasy, since they were probably trained just in one of the areas. Krulatz (2019) and Cammarata (2010) found other negative reactions from instructors, such as

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<sup>v</sup> with exception of courses where CBI is mixed with TBI, such as the one described by Khairi (2016).

reluctance to change methods, difficulties aligning content and language, or complaints about the amount of work that CBI involved. Baecher et al. (2013) found that some instructors had difficulties designing language objectives compared to content objectives, and their language objectives often lacked adequate focus on grammar. Despite these challenges, CBI and CLIL is generally accepted as an adequate teaching approach for 21<sup>st</sup> century foreign language courses because it integrates skills, attention is focused on meaning before form, students find content matter interesting, and it makes language learning authentic and purposeful.

## 9. Motivation

We know that motivation, especially intrinsic motivation, plays a crucial role in foreign language learning (Dörnyei, 2010). Several factors affect motivation, such as age, gender, interest, previous experiences, instructor's behavior, instructor's approach, classroom atmosphere, syllabus design, and others. Keeping students motivated is a difficult task, but it seems more difficult when dealing with overstimulated students who grew up playing video games and chatting on their smart phones with their friends. Cox (2014) cites several studies that show negative phenomena occurring parallel to the benefits of globalization and increased use of technology, such as disaffection by young people, quick disinterest in outdated technologies, growing number of cases with attention disorders, and declining student interest, enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation for learning in school. Busse and Walter (2013) also found lack of motivation during the first year, which involved decreased levels of enjoyment and declining engagement.

Today's students need to be actively engaged and interested in what they are doing. The 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, which include critical thinking, innovation, creativity, problem solving, collaboration, media literacy, initiative, cross-cultural skills, leadership, and communication, among others (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, 2011), are aiming at doing exactly that: engaging students. These skills need to be present in any innovative curriculum. Empowering students keeps students motivated and engaged (Collier, 2017; Lee-Smith, 2021; Liu, 2015). Tran and Duong (2018) found that learning about culture not only increased their students' linguistic competence, but also increased their motivation. Jauregi et al. (2011) found that having native/non-native video interactions increased students' motivation and their perception of learning. Cox (2014) claims that to achieve 'flow' or *"to be fully absorbed in a challenging mental, emotional and/or physical activity"* (p. 4), students need to have control, find meaning and purpose in their learning, and this learning must be for authentic purposes. She claims that *"combining high intellectual demands with positive emotional connection will more easily take place in authentic, contextualized tasks because they are more meaningful"* (p. 96). Citing Fredericks (2004), she mentions that engagement must be behavioral (participation), emotional (reactions, attitude), and cognitive (investment, focus). Dörnyei (2010) lists 35 strategies to motivate students and reminds instructors that they *"should aim to become 'good enough motivators' rather than striving unreasonably to achieve 'Supermotivator' status"* (p. 136). There is a lot of

evidence that *“teachers are a key prerequisite for students’ classroom engagement and investment of effort”* (Li et al., 2019, p. 540).

Besides having a curriculum with interesting and engaging tasks, classroom materials also need to be appealing to 21<sup>st</sup> century students. Materials should be up to date, relevant to their lives and concerns, appropriate (in terms of age, language, themes, etc.), and socially and culturally engaging. According to García León et al. (2011), *“multimodal texts are perceived as meaningful and motivational resources”* (p. 33). Here is where instructional technology is so important. The pedagogy of multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1996), for example, is becoming trendy now because it focuses on meaning over form, utilizes multimodal materials, and promotes 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

## 10. Professional Development

Because the field of foreign language teaching is changing so rapidly, instructors need to invest in their professional development on a continuous basis. This development can be expressed in multiple ways, including collaborating with colleagues, trying new techniques, attending workshops and conferences, paying attention to problematic design or classroom issues, reading journals and books, and examining materials created by reputable educational organizations. The Douglas Fir Group (2016) states that collaboration among instructors from multiple disciplinary and stakeholder perspectives might be the solution to the ever-changing landscapes of L2 learners. When instructors collaborate with each other, they *“maximize intellectual endeavors that are creative in nature by sharing knowledge, learning and building consensus”* (Sullivan, 2010, p. 16), which will, in turn, affect their students’ learning.

Eaton (2010) recommends instructors to adapt their approaches to stay current in today’s rapid changing world. For example, she recommends eliminating cloze activities because they do not reflect the complexity involved in learning a language and they focus on what students cannot do. Instead, she recommends instructors to implement benchmark systems and frameworks developed by well-respected foreign language educational institutions, such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001). ACTFL and Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning (P21) have worked collaboratively to create a map of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. This document includes a side-by-side comparison of ‘yesterday’ and ‘today’ classroom characteristics that is very useful for any instructor who wants to keep their instruction up to date.

Instructors need to exercise caution when trying innovative approaches and leaving traditional methods behind. Before accepting or rejecting new methods, we need *“to do more research on the mechanisms of learning and accompany new proposals and methods with more experimental evidence before we bring them into the classroom”* (Sánchez, 2004, p. 65). An example is the now trendy pedagogy of multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1996). Allen and Paesani (2010) admit that teacher training in this pedagogy is challenging mainly for three reasons: instructors hesitate to deviate from the textbook, there are no multiliteracies-oriented textbooks available, and instructors *“may have limited or no knowledge of alternative frameworks... or how to apply them in the classroom”* (p. 125).

The authors suggest ongoing professional development, especially after research done by Allen (2011, as cited in Allen & Paesani, 2010) showing that it took four semesters for two TAs of Spanish to show evidence of the ability to think through concepts of literacy in structuring teaching practices.

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility are some topics instructors need to evaluate in their professional development training to make sure their classes reflect 21<sup>st</sup> century pedagogies and beliefs. With progressively smaller groups in foreign language classes, instructors have more opportunities than in the past to attend to individual learning styles, pay individualized attention to students, give more appropriate individual feedback, and accommodate disabilities, as inclusive pedagogy suggests. Dion (2020) cites several studies that associate inclusive pedagogy to students' sense of belonging, willingness to participate, and ability to learn independently, and she suggests that instructors should develop activities that draw upon students' identities to make their classes more inclusive. Regarding diversity, by using a more reflective and critical thinking approach to the teaching of culture (big C, small c, mainstream culture, and less represented cultures) and by acknowledging their diverse student body, instructors can increase diversity in the classroom. The topic of equity has come about often during the year of pandemic evidenced by the lack of proper access to instructional technology that disadvantaged and rural communities endured. Although equity is largely a matter outside the power of instructors, they can also do their part, such as being flexible and understanding with deadlines and submission formats, arranging with publishers the provision of free materials to low-income students, and supporting minoritized students whose educational background may be below what is expected. Dion (2020) strongly suggests instructors to attend workshops and conferences, collaborate and observe colleagues, and making connections to the community to learn how to foster diversity and inclusive pedagogies in their curriculum.

## **Conclusion**

Instructional technology has radically changed the way instructors teach and students learn. Although it provides numerous benefits, it should be treated with caution, like any other tool, to avoid perpetuating gaps between students of different socioeconomic status or overwhelming students with complicated, time-consuming tasks to the detriment of actual cultural or language learning. One of the many benefits of instructional technology is to facilitate synchronous communication with native speakers and to enable the integration of culture into the classroom in a meaningful way. With a more reflective, problem-solving, critical thinking approach to culture teaching, we can improve students' understanding of this globalized world. This approach should incorporate other aspects that motivate our students to learn more and continue learning, such as collaboration, modern and engaging materials, meaningful communicative tasks, and practical and cognitively challenging activities. Just like in real life, skills should be integrated for the purpose of communication, and grammar should be contextualized for a more fulfilling experience. By connecting foreign language learning with other

disciplines, we can make learning a foreign language a more relevant experience to students' lives and increase their interest.

Our job as instructors is never ending due to the continuous evolving nature of our field, and for that reason, we need to stay abreast of the times. We must strive to improve the way we teach by reflecting regularly on our own practices, observing colleagues with different teaching styles, learning from more experienced instructors, collaborating with instructors in other disciplines, attending workshops and conferences, performing action research, and reading articles and books that deal with foreign language teaching and learning.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author declares no conflicts of interests.

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